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THE FORGOTTEN CONTINENT:
THE FUTURE OF UNITED STATES POLICY IN ANTARCTICA

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Paper Abstract

The Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) is nearly 60 years old, and technology has made the Antarctic region far more accessible today than it was when the ATS went into effect. The South Pole region has incredible potential for resource exploitation which has already caused numerous political clashes. Moreover, there are many nations with existing, often overlapping, territorial claims that are now becoming accessible for permanent habitation and commercial use. As a result, the United States should make preparations for a rapid response to potential military conflict in Antarctica and the surrounding Southern Ocean.

INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of man, our race has been driven to new frontiers, new territory, and new feats of exploration. Our motivations are varied, but the results are undeniable: that when an area isn't occupied or used, we will find a way to do so. Antarctica is no exception, from the first recorded sighting of its islands in 1819 to the successful attainment of the South Pole by British explorer Robert Falcon Scott, and continuing with the regular scientific expeditions of today, the continent is often visited.¹ It remains, however, overwhelmingly uninhabited, but absolutely teeming with possibility.

The world's fifth largest continent has an area of 14.2 million square kilometers, with numerous surrounding islands that add over ten thousand square kilometers more, not to mention the vast ice on and surrounding the land mass.² To put this into some perspective, that land mass is almost equal to the size of the two smaller continents, Europe and Australia, combined.³ This land and the surrounding waters, including the Ross and Weddell Seas, contain a virtually untapped plethora of resources, and if one simply described this area without naming it, every nation in the world would likely be interested in pursuing ways to benefit from its use. Unfortunately, Antarctica is also known to be the "the coldest... the driest, the windiest, the highest, the remotest, the least accessible, the most desolate and the most unpleasant region on earth."⁴ This fact has caused governments to apply a sense of relative disinterest to the continent in comparison with their other national objectives.

In his 1991 book, *Antarctica: Private Property of Public Heritage?* Keith Suter

¹ Gabrielle Walker, *Antarctica: An Intimate Portrait of a Mysterious Continent* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2013), xlii; Deborah Shapely, *The Seventh Continent: Antarctica in a Resource Age* (Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future, Inc., 1985), 1.

² Ishwar C. Sharma, *Antarctica: Geopolitics and Resources* (New Delhi: Inter-India Publications, 1992), 38.

³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴ Emilio J. Sahurie, *The International Law of Antarctica* (New Haven, CT: New Haven Press, 1992), xxi.

accurately says, "The world has only two frontiers left: the sea-bed and Antarctica. Like the sea floor, Antarctica is only recently being made vulnerable to exploitation because of advances in technology and the exhaustion of the more easily accessible resources elsewhere on earth."⁵ More than twenty years later, the gates to this amazing world continue to widen, and its place on the international agenda gains import; the politics of the southern corner of the globe are dominated by a remarkably successful treaty. Signed in 1959, the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) has worked well, in part, because of the overwhelming nonfeasibility of exploiting resources in the area, which is an assumption that is rapidly becoming more dated.⁶ Numerous nations, including the United States, as well as private corporations have great interest in the area, and these conflicts of interest threaten to destroy the longstanding peace of the Antarctic region.⁷ As a world leader, it is important for the United States to take steps to prevent this destabilization. Therefore, as technology continues to make this area more accessible, and as numerous nations attempt to expand their influence over the region, the United States must establish a permanent military line of logistics to Antarctica in order to maintain a global leadership role and the continued security of the continent and its surrounding waters.

THE HISTORY OF THE ATLANTIC TREATY SYSTEM AND THE UNITED NATIONS

On December 1, 1959, in Washington, twelve nations signed the Antarctic Treaty. The origins can be traced back to the 1940s, when the United Kingdom, Chile, and Argentina had conflicting territorial claims, and continued into the Cold War, when the United States felt the

⁵ Keith Suter, *Antarctica: Private Property or Public Heritage?* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books Ltd, 1991), 1.

⁶ Sahurie, *International Law*, xxiii.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xxv.

need to protect against the establishment of potential Soviet missile-launch sites.⁸ The treaty went into effect for a period of thirty years beginning in 1961, and during that time the twelve original signatories were joined by an additional fourteen. Of these twenty-six nations, seven had existing territorial claims before the treaty was signed.⁹ For the first several years of the ATS, there was very little, if any, conflict or debate over the agreement.

In 1983, however, the Prime Minister of Malaysia argued before the United Nations (UN) General Assembly that Antarctica and other uninhabited areas should receive international attention, favoring the establishment of a new international regime instead of the existing ATS and formally placing the issue on the UN agenda.¹⁰ There it would remain, discussed at least once every three years, until resolution 60/47 was passed in 2005.¹¹ In between, the UN remained seized on the issue, but mandated regular reports by the Secretary-General (UNSG) on the continent and continued to schedule further discussion during future assemblies. Resolution 60/47, however, effectively stopped both the regular reports by the UNSG on the future of Antarctica, and the scheduled discussions by UN committees, which were previously discussed triennially.¹²

The Antarctic Treaty System remains intact long after its originally scheduled end-date, after the 2005 UN resolution, and even after the 1983 challenge to its validity. Malaysia's claim that the continent should be treated as *res nullius*, defined as the property of no one but claimable by anyone who is able to demonstrate control, went unratified.¹³ It went, also,

⁸ Christopher C Joyner, *Governing the Frozen Commons: The Antarctic Regime and Environmental Protection* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 54, 56.

⁹ Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 152.

¹⁰ Sahurie, *International Law*, 68, 69.

¹¹ Peter J. Beck, "The United Nations and Antarctica, 2005: the End of the 'Question of Antarctica'?" *Polar Record* 42, No 222 (2006): 217.

¹² *Ibid.*, 223.

¹³ Joyner, *Frozen Commons*, 31; Beck "United Nations," 226.

undenounced since the UN's final answer was to remain seized and refrain from a planned discussion in the future. Although *Polar Record* writer and professor at Kingston University Peter J. Beck advises that the topic "should not be written off, at least not yet,"¹⁴ the UN seems to have done precisely that.

THE AVAILABLE RESOURCES OF ANTARCTICA

The global situation is changing; the resources and accessibility in the South Pole region are making international attention increasingly vital. The global community is obligated to further our species by exploration and exploitation, and a wise global power would be naïve to neglect this fact.¹⁵ So what, exactly, is available for exploitation in Antarctica? The simple answer is that, as explained by Australian Minister for Resources, Energy, and Tourism Martin Ferguson while discussing Antarctica's resource potential, "The truth of the matter is that they have been hardly explored. . . . This is potentially a bonanza."¹⁶ First, there are a vast untapped number of natural resources on and around the continent. "One estimate suggests that there may be more than 900 major mineral deposits in Antarctica. About 20 could be expected to be located in ice-free areas."¹⁷ Twenty out of 900 may sound like a small number, but ice-free areas are certainly not the only areas that could be accessed. Even if they were, those areas could still be rife with economic possibilities for a motivated industrialist.

Specifically, it is well known that Antarctica was once part of an ancient, resource-rich continent called Gondwanaland, made up of parts of South America, India, and Australia.¹⁸ The once adjacent regions could reasonably be expected to contain similar deposits as one

¹⁴ Beck, "United Nations," 227.

¹⁵ Klaus J. Dodds, "Sovereignty Watch: Claimant States, Resources, and Territory in Contemporary Antarctica," *Polar Record* 47, No 242 (2011): 231.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ William E. Westermeyer, *The Politics of Mineral Resource Development in Antarctica: Alternative Regimes for the Future* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), 36.

¹⁸ Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 103.

another. Many of the areas on other, formerly connected continents have large mineral reserves, indicating that they likely exist in Antarctica as well, namely: lead, zinc, tungsten, copper, tin, silver, gold, copper, methane, ethane, ethylene, natural gas, and oil.¹⁹ Specifically with regard to highly desired fossil fuels, the *Wall Street Journal* estimated that approximately 45 billion barrels of oil and 115 trillion cubic feet of natural gas were likely to be found in favorable areas of the region.²⁰ While the mining of oil, specifically, is not economically viable at this time, it may become so in the future. In fact, numerous prominent energy companies are likely to begin exploring for reserves immediately if the United States government would provide adequate political support.²¹ If fossil fuels become obsolete due to an increase in nuclear power production, the uranium found in the Antarctic Continental shelf could also become an invaluable mining target.²² Additionally, with the rise in global population, simple fresh water may soon be an increasingly prized commodity, and Antarctica is almost entirely smothered by it. Approximately 26 million cubic kilometers of ice reside in the area, representing about 65 percent of the globe's total supply of fresh water. Australian conservationist Gilbert Wallace explains that, "even a moderately-sized iceberg, positioned near one of our capital cities, could supply large quantities of fresh water and of power (because of the temperature differential), not to mention the attraction for tourism."²³ There would be no shortage of ice in the short term; the largest single iceberg ever seen was recorded near Antarctica in 1956, and was the size of the nation of Belgium.²⁴

¹⁹ Westermeyer, *Politics*, 37.

²⁰ Jonathan Spinak, "Frozen Assets? Now, the Energy Crisis Spurs Idea of Seeking Oil at the South Pole," *The Wall Street Journal* (Feb 21, 1974): 1, accessed May 17, 2018, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/133887421?accountid=322>.

²¹ Westermeyer, *Politics*, 42.

²² Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 134.

²³ Suter, *Private or Public*, 156.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4

Along with the vast non-living resources on the continent, there is an equally impressive array of living biotic resources which may be exploited. There are numerous species of fish in the Antarctic convergence; in 1971 alone, thirty thousand metric tons of cod, herring, and others were caught there by Russian commercial fishing efforts.²⁵ Seals can also be found in abundance, with six species tempting enough to be protected by a 1972 Convention of Antarctic Seals. The Convention was rendered ineffective, though, because the Atlantic Treaty Consultative Parties (ATCP) “felt incompetent (and were unwilling) to control certain activities on the high seas, such as pelagic sealing [and furthermore], the ATCPs are not legally competent to restrict the exercise of rights to the high seas, including the taking of living resources.”²⁶ Antarctic waters are also teeming with many species of harvestable whales, useful for their edible oils among other things, and more than a million whales had been killed by 1992.²⁷

Perhaps the most critical living resource is krill, caught mostly for food in the form of a nutritious fish paste in Russia and Japan. It is also a vital source of nutrients to other harvestable marine life, and at an estimated 150 million tons, is likely the largest untapped source of animal protein on the planet.²⁸ Since 1970, interest in Antarctic krill has greatly increased, and claims have been made not only by ATC states who “basically claimed freedom of access to exploit the marine living resources of Antarctica,”²⁹ but also by those outside the treaty system such as South Korea and Taiwan.³⁰ Furthermore, the nation of India has the intention to greatly increase its consumption of Antarctic krill in the twenty-first century to fight the growing problems of

²⁵ Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 112.

²⁶ Joyner, *Frozen Commons*, 121.

²⁷ Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 113.

²⁸ Suter, *Private or Public*, 36; Sahurie, *International Law*, 507.

²⁹ Sahurie, *International Law*, 508.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

malnutrition and over-population.³¹

Economic interest in Antarctica also extends beyond natural resources. Tourism continues to be a treasure trove of potential income to interested corporations worldwide, with more than 70,000 shipborne tourists visiting since 1957.³² Helmut Rhode and Partners, a Sydney firm, proposed an ambitious project that would offer visitors a stay in a hotel heated by the burning of human waste which could generate increased revenue.³³ Such proposals appear profitable to numerous companies in many countries, including the United States.

GROWING INTERNATIONAL INTEREST

It is clear that interest in the region has and will continue to grow as necessity and technology dictate. Even the United States and her allies have been involved in the changing political debate. Australia, for example, has been involved in disputes over fishing rights in the area, and in 2004, the Royal Australian Navy created a new policy for patrolling the Southern Ocean to deter unwanted fishing by many nations including Japan, China, Russia, and even the United States.³⁴ Whaling has also become a hot topic, as the ATS signatories have struggled, even among themselves, to find common ground on the contested practice.³⁵ Japanese whaling, specifically, is a highly contentious issue. University of London professor Klaus J. Dodds wrote that the current relationship between Japan and other ATS members was certainly not in keeping with the original spirit of the treaty, and potentially an indication of outright violations.³⁶ Moreover, Australia is “using a piece of domestic law to seek an injunction through the Australian Federal Court against Japanese whalers in ‘Australian’ waters off the Australian

³¹ Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 137.

³² Joyner, *Frozen Commons*, 202.

³³ Suter, *Private or Public*, 154.

³⁴ Dodds, “Sovereignty Watch,” 239.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 240.

Antarctic Territory, [even as Australia and New Zealand, both original territorial claimants,] seek preferential access or conditions.”³⁷

South America is also full of nations with political interest. Argentina had claims on the continent in 1959, and according to a 2017 article by the Agencia EFE, a major Spanish multimedia news agency, “Argentina believes its future in Antarctica...is [tremendous],”³⁸ and sees massive fishing potential in the South Atlantic. The article further claims that the fishing stock in the area is on the rise and calls for national support to manage the next 30 years.³⁹ Argentine foreign minister Susana Malcorra expressed concern over poaching in the area, and said of the continent, “how we use it and make sure it’s not done illegally and how we defend our interests – all that has to be part of our strategy.”⁴⁰

Chile, which claims a cone of territory extending from the South Pole northward, encompassing approximately 1.25 million kilometers called the Chilean Antarctic Territory (CAT), has remained extremely vigilant over this area since long before the ATS went into effect.⁴¹ With understandable interest in the mineral and living resources in the CAT and for securing its claims of ownership, Chile endeavored to construct a permanent settlement on Charcot Island.⁴² According to former National Defense University International Fellow and Chilean Army Brigadier Luis S. Mericq, “Chile feels it is unquestionably entitled to this territory because of geographical continuity, proven historical antiquity, contiguousness of

³⁷ Alan D. Hemmings, “From the New Geopolitics of Resources to Nanotechnology: Emerging Challenges of Globalism in Antarctica,” 1 *Y. B. Polar L.* 55 (2009), 66.

³⁸ EFE News Service, “Argentina Sees ‘Tremendous’ Future in Antarctica, Vast Fishing Resources,” *EFE News Service; Madrid* (Jan 13, 2017), 1. Accessed Mar 18, 2018, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1858174401?accountid=322>.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Luis H. Mericq, *Antarctica, Chile’s Claim* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1987), 81.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 102, 103.

continental territory, and maintenance of a permanent and growing scientific activity in that part of the world.”⁴³

Of course the United States and her closest ally, the United Kingdom, are also closely monitoring the political situation surrounding the ATS. The UK, along with its common interest in originally claimed territory and access to resources, has acute awareness of the strategic military advantage of Antarctica’s proximity to its territory in the Falkland Islands because of its bloody defense of the islands in 1982.⁴⁴ Additionally, the United States “has not given up the option of acting unilaterally if satisfactory resource exploitation provisions cannot be negotiated,”⁴⁵ and neither nation is particularly interested in sharing any advantage derived from the area with others.⁴⁶ The United States has also considered air routes over the continent. The importance of such routes is likely to grow, and the government already has a commercial aviation agreement in place with Australia to govern routes that could save three thousand to seven thousand miles over existing routes.⁴⁷ It is important to note, however, that under the current ATS, military use of Antarctic air space is not allowed.⁴⁸

Some of the stakeholders of this issue are potentially more dangerous. Russia has been deeply invested in Antarctica since 1960, particularly in the harvesting of krill and other sea life near South Georgia and the Kerguelen islands.⁴⁹ Russia has a long-established reservation of rights, as does the United States, to make territorial claims on the continent in the future, and neither nation appears willing to decisively give up that right. Both countries would likely

⁴³ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁴ Westermeyer, *Politics*, 173.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 174.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 175.

⁴⁷ Sahurle, *International Law*, 561.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 564.

⁴⁹ Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 164.

reevaluate their lack of an ownership stake of the continent if the ATS was disbanded.⁵⁰ What is certainly clear is that Russia's goals in Antarctica are not exclusively scientific, but driven at least in part by political and economic motivations.⁵¹ As Russia regains influence on the global stage, these objectives may lead to increased tension with western countries.

CHINA'S ROLE

Perhaps the most worrisome nation with a major interest in Antarctica is China. The Chinese government has noticeably increased its engagement there since 2005.⁵² China was initially excluded from the ATS, mainly due to Chinese insistence that its inclusion should preclude its adversary, Taiwan, from joining. The international community declined to agree to these stipulations, and China remained on the outside.⁵³ The People's Republic of China (PRC) acceded more than 20 years later and was granted full consultative status in 1985, possibly as a way of preventing China's support for Malaysia during the initial anti-treaty movement that began in 1983.⁵⁴ As yet, the PRC has also not made any territorial claims, although it has declined from recognizing any other member's claims.⁵⁵ Since its inclusion, the PRC has steadily increased its presence in the Southern Ocean, culminating in 2015 with its declaration of intent "for an unprecedented expansion of fishing for Antarctic krill."⁵⁶ In his article for the *The Sun Herald* entitled "China Moves in for the Krill," Andrew Darby notes that, "China has

⁵⁰ Sahurie, *International Law*, 576.

⁵¹ Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 165.

⁵² Anne-Marie Brady, "China's Rise in Antarctica," *Asian Survey* 50, No. 4 (July/August 2010), 759.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 761.

⁵⁴ Wei-chin Lee, "China and Antarctica: So Far and Yet so Near," *Asian Survey* 30, No. 6 (June 1990), 576; Brady, "China's Rise," 762.

⁵⁵ Lee, "China and Antarctica," 583.

⁵⁶ Andrew Darby, "China Moves in for the Krill," *The Sun Herald* (April 12, 2015), 1, accessed May 17, 2018. <https://www.smh.com.au/environment/china-moves-in-for-the-krill-20150327-1m9868.html>. Andrew, "China Moves In," 1.

the largest fleet authorized to fish for krill in the Antarctic, with eight 5000 to 7000-tonne factory freezer trawlers. Its agricultural group controls the country's largest high-seas fishing fleet,"⁵⁷ and the krill which is planned to be taken is more than the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition could manage and monitor.⁵⁸ The inability to do so has already manifested itself, as four Chinese vessels were caught conducting illegal fish harvesting activities in the Southern Ocean in August of 2007, and a Hong Kong-based multinational fishing company called Pacific Andes was implicated in the illegal fishing of the Patagonian Toothfish, a highly endangered species.⁵⁹

Chinese political pressure, while mostly within the bounds of the ATS, has clearly frustrated its members. Australian Labour Federal parliamentarian, David Feeney, suggests that "China leads a growing number of emerging powers that are investing in Antarctica [and that] Australia is in very real danger of losing its leadership status."⁶⁰ He goes on to "express concern that other states are usurping Australia's status and influence in Antarctica."⁶¹ The expansion is growing at an incredible rate. In the two decades following the PRC's entrance into the ATC, China spent around 110 million dollars, but spent approximately 60 million dollars on upgrading Antarctic bases alone from 2005-2008.⁶² Chinese tourism efforts are also on the rise; although no tourism operators were licensed to work there as of 2010, China is interested in gaining the proper licensure in order to capitalize on the increasing proclivity of its citizens to travel the world.⁶³

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Brady, "China's Rise," 771, 772.

⁶⁰ Jeffrey McGee and Danielle Smith, "Framing Australian Antarctic Policy: the 20-Year Antarctic Plan and Beyond," *Australian Journal of Maritime and Ocean Affairs* 9, No. 1 (2017), 29.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Brady, "China's Rise," 768.

⁶³ Ibid., 770.

Thus far, China has been completely peaceful during its steady increase rise in Antarctica, but the future could be less friendly. "With its huge population, China may someday need the mineral riches and fishing stocks presumed to be in Antarctica,"⁶⁴ and such a need could necessitate a change in China's international policy regarding the continent. Anne-Marie Brady argues that China has already manipulated international agreements in an effort to weaken Taiwan's global influence, and that China could easily use the ATS in a similar fashion in the near future.⁶⁵ In 2007, official PRC news sources were antagonistic in their coverage of United Kingdom claims for sea bed rights on the Continental Shelf, and China accused the UK of "using the International Law of the Sea to gain non-sovereignty related rights in Antarctica."⁶⁶

MILITARY IMPORTANCE

The largest risk for the United States lies in any potential military escalation in the area. Clearly, Antarctica has numerous traits that could be of strategic military importance: a tie between the Southern Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, especially if the Panama Canal is compromised; trans-Antarctic logistical lines, which could be shorter and more expeditious to certain destinations; and access to areas in the southern hemisphere should conflict arise, such as the southern portions of Africa and South America.⁶⁷ The Falklands War, which was "intimately linked to the dispute over the Antarctic Peninsula,"⁶⁸ provides an excellent recent example of the possibility of fighting south of the equator. While such issues in other parts of the world could lead to military action near Antarctica, it is not outside the realm of possibility that a battle could ignite in the Southern Ocean over the many aforementioned matters. Brady

⁶⁴ Lee, "China and Antarctica," 581.

⁶⁵ Brady, "China's Rise," 771.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 776-777.

⁶⁷ Mericq, *Chile's Claim*, 45, 46.

⁶⁸ Sahurie, *International Law*, 578.

goes on to warn that, “if conflict erupts over polar resources, China might also need military back-up to protect its interests. In 2008, the People’s Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) began providing protection to Chinese merchant ships in the Gulf of Aden. A similar scenario could be envisioned regarding transferring resources from either of the poles back to China.”⁶⁹ Such military protection of Antarctic shipping could easily result in an escalation of violence if China were challenged by other states. If China, in particular, wishes to get its share of the economic potential in the vicinity of the white continent, it will have to heavily prioritize not only civilian research, but also strong military capabilities.⁷⁰

The exploitation potential in the region will continue to cause increased necessity for military presence. The krill fishing industry is likely to become the center of illegal resource exploitation in the near future, and naval surface vessels along with aerial surveillance will be required to maintain order. The Australian Navy, as of 2016, lacks the ability to intervene appropriately, and is aggressively pursuing ways to manage the evolving maritime arena.⁷¹ Such activity would require increased military infrastructure; many parts of Antarctica, including the fringing islands, could be of great military importance to interested parties with potential to be used as airfields, weather stations, radar sites, and military bases.⁷² In short, “the strategic importance of the seas, islands, and the whole Antarctic Continent in a military sense is unquestionable.”⁷³

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the Antarctic region will be increasingly important in international politics in the coming years. The ATS has worked well thus far, but the system is nearing its sixtieth

⁶⁹ Brady, “China’s Rise,” 776.

⁷⁰ Brady, “China’s Rise,” 776.

⁷¹ McGee, “Framing Australian Policy,” 31-32.

⁷² Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 209.

⁷³ Mericq, *Chile’s Claim*, 44.

year, and its success has been, at least in part, a result of the formidable challenges to accessing the icy world. While difficulty remains, these challenges are no longer beyond the capacity of the United States and others to overcome.⁷⁴ As technology continues to make the region more accessible, the industrial nations of the world can be reasonably expected to send more ships, aircraft, and personnel south to explore the widening opportunities found there.

The economic value of the continent is obvious, especially regarding resources necessary for generating power and procuring food sources. Oil, natural gas, and uranium could soon become viable cash crops for motivated industrialists, and exploitation of the vast numbers of krill and other sea life has already sharply increased. Numerous nations have shown interest in these mostly untapped generators of wealth, and all indications point to an increase in global participation in the future. As commercial interests converge, conflicts are sure to arise over the ownership of valuable resources found in Antarctica.⁷⁵ As Emilio J. Sahurie writes in his book entitled *The International Law of Antarctica*, "Increasing perceptions about the more immediate economic value of Antarctica have prompted demands for radical changes in Antarctic processes to share the riches."⁷⁶ With these new challenges, the era of global cooperation in the region could rapidly be coming to an end.⁷⁷

The seven territorial claimants of land near the South Pole do not appear to be willing to denounce their claims. The United States, along with many other nations, do not recognize these territories, and the U.S. South Pole station stands as a political symbol of this fact.⁷⁸ None of the pre-ATS claims appear to have a strong basis in international law. In order to make a more legally binding claim of sovereignty, claimant states and newcomers will have to

⁷⁴ Hemmings, "New Geopolitics," 69.

⁷⁵ Sharma, *Geopolitics*, 217.

⁷⁶ Sahurie, *International Law*, 576.

⁷⁷ Westermeyer, *Politics*, 190.

⁷⁸ Shapely, *Resource Age*, 197.

establish more permanent occupations of its current and future bases. Such an increase in traffic will coincide with a potential increase in conflict and necessitate a more robust capability to regulate and manage the real estate.⁷⁹ The international community, as a whole, may attempt to forego the established agreements and take over governance in a more forceful manner.⁸⁰ If this were the case, the United States must take a leadership role and be able to enforce its interests.

While many past military conflicts have occurred north of the equator, the United States would be foolish to ignore the strategic importance of the Antarctic region. The Falklands War highlighted the potential for a conflict in Antarctica, and without an updated power structure, similar crises on much larger scales may erupt without warning.⁸¹ Additionally, the need for enforcement of current and future policies will require military infrastructure. Many potential enemies of the West have increased their activity in the Southern Ocean and have already conflicted with our allies. Australia and China have failed recently at a diplomatic resolution to their differences over alleged illegal fishing and whaling activities, and China's "obsession...will pit it against many within the international community."⁸² As the leaders of the United States look to the shape the future of its military, they must strive to make the necessary preparations, lest they be beaten to the punch by an aggressive and innovative adversary. The PRC, for example, does not yet appear to have the intention of militarily challenge existing powers, in Antarctica or otherwise, but that could quickly change.⁸³ One cannot predict what other nations will do, and to attempt to assume their motivations or goals is folly. Instead, the only safe course of action from a position of global power is to prepare for

⁷⁹ Joyner, *Frozen Commons*, 53.

⁸⁰ Shapely, *Resource Age*, 248.

⁸¹ Westermeyer, *Politics*, 190.

⁸² Brady, "China's Rise," 779.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 785.

conflict as a way of actively preventing it.

Clearly there are numerous national priorities and an increasingly limited budget. One could not currently justify the allocation of funds away from the wars of the Middle East to an area of comparative peace. So, too, would it be unwise to ignore the growing importance of the Arctic region to military, specifically naval, policy in the twenty-first century. However, the seventh continent must not be ignored altogether, as has been mostly the case since 1959. If the United States wishes to maintain its current standing as a global leader, “then exercising and sustaining the necessary political will to accomplish [the goal of preservation and conservation] ranks as the critical consideration.”⁸⁴

Rather than the status quo of scientific research stations and rare military visits to the area, a permanent line of logistics must be put in place to allow for a rapid military response. If war began over territorial claims, fishing or mining rights, or other vital national interests, such preparations will preclude any potential enemies from establishing a foothold on and around Antarctica before the United States could prepare to respond. Additionally, the increase in military presence would be poised and ready to protect the inevitable increase in maritime shipping, air traffic, and commercial exploration that is sure to occur in the near future, securing the economic interests of U.S. companies and those of her allies. The military would also be able to enforce conservation efforts, if the numerous and controversial environmental issues of Antarctica are a national priority (a topic for another essay). Such military permanence would allow the United States to maintain an advantage in the region, no matter the future of the ATS. This antiquated agreement, described as a “regime frozen in time and crippled by its adherence to positions adopted 50 years earlier,”⁸⁵ by University of Canterbury

⁸⁴ Joyner, *Frozen Commons*, 269.

⁸⁵ Hemmings, “New Geopolitics,” 72.

Associate Professor Alan D. Hemmings, could dissolve at any time. The next phase of Antarctica's governance, as a result of its newfound accessibility, will need a stronger force in order to police the increased activity there. The United States should be that force.

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